BENEFITS OF USING INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract

This is an age of science and technology. The rapid developments in the field have altered the very structure of the society considerably. One such off shoot of the advancement of science and technology which brought a sea change in every sphere of society is Information and Communication Technology (ICT). In the field of education also, ICT is a very useful tool for imparting knowledge effectively. In language teaching, because of the numerous benefits ICT has, it proved to be a palliative to many problems and hindrances. Especially in English Language Teaching (ELT), ICT has become a boon to both teachers and learners through its benefits. The present paper, therefore, focuses on the benefits of ICT in ELT and discusses how it is quintessential tool for effective English language teaching.

Index Terms - Information and Communication Technology, Information and Communication Technology.

We all know that what distinguishes the age we live now from earlier ages its advancement in the field of science and technology. A great leap in the field of science and technology in this century has brought considerable changes in every sphere of our society. From the crack of the day to till the end of the day, we enjoy and experience the contributions of science and technology in every move our life. The old systems which required both long time and heavy expenditure for any end of production are replaced today by various machines and innovations of science and technology. Out of the invaluable contributions of science and technology, Information and Communication Technology (popularly abbreviated as ICT) is a pathbreaking achievement as it brought a sea change in all the sectors of production and distribution.

In simple, ICT is using computer technology in the process of obtaining, sharing and storing information. The concept is defined as a "diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store, and manage information." (Burton). The set of technological tools includes computer and its accessories, Internet connectivity, broadcasting technologies like radio and television, and telephony. According to Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary, ICT is "the study of the use of computers, the internet, video, and other technology as a subject at school". It is evident from both that the emergence of ICT paved way for replacement of the old system of sharing and treasuring information by the modern electronic equipment computer.

The growth in the field of ICT has eased our way of living in a variety of ways. One such a field where ICT has been proved to be a palliative to many problems is in the field of education. Its easy access to information, easy storage and easy sharing of the same made ICT an integral part of today's teaching-learning process. Hence, ICT enabled teaching is one of the most discussed concepts of this era as it brought drastic changes in the field. ICT has made today's class room a digital forum just as it made the whole world as a global village. In the context of a language classroom, ICT is a boon for both students and teachers as it helps in number of ways to reach the goal of language teaching. Especially, in English Language Teaching (ELT), both as EFL and ESL, teaching-learning using ICT a number of benefits. The present study attempts to discuss some important benefits of using ICT in English language teaching. Though the benefits of using ICT change along with new inventions, the following are some major benefits of the concept:

1) Learner Centric Teaching-Learning:

One of the major benefits of using ICT in teaching is it makes the learning process learner centric and contribute to experiential learning. In any situation or method of learning, participation of the learners decides the success. Especially, in the context of learning a second or foreign language, the learners hardly get right forum to practice the language. Further, sufficient and effective learning never takes place unless active involvement of the learners is achieved. Using ICT in English teaching enables individual participation as each learner can be given a computer system to learn as there in Language labs. Moreover, since individual participation is possible, it caters to all levels of learners as slow learner can take more time where as a fast learner can jump to successive lessons.

2) Techer as a Facilitator:

In an ICT enabled English classroom, the role of the teacher shifts from a teacher to a facilitator. Using ICT, the learners can be provided with the stored lessons. This makes a direct participation of learners giving much time to them. A teacher in such a context acts as a facilitator, a mentor to guide learners to the lessons. A long lecture of a teacher becomes fragmented instructions wherever required. This will break 'the monotony' and 'the monopoly' in the classroom making learning a lively and creative process.

3) Sufficient Room for Practice:

A swimmer cannot learn swimming unless he jumps into the water and try to swim. Similarly, a language learner needs adequate practice to gain the language competence. Research studies have proved that poor English language learning in India is mainly the result of lack of adequate practice in the learning process. As a result of some apprehensions such as hesitation to learn a foreign language, fear of mistake, excessively self-centric attitude, lack of time and so on, English language learners miss the amount of practice they required for learning the language. Using ICT in ELT as in the context of a language lab for instance, enables learners to repeat lessons and practice it any number of times. Here, a learner has the freedom of choice to decide to practice the same lesson or move on to the next lesson.

4) Quick Assessment and Easy Feedback:

Another benefit of using ICT in teaching English is it helps quick assessment of the learning, often self-assessment of the learnt lessons as well. Thereby it provides a quick feedback of the learnt lessons to the teacher. In a language laboratory for instance, one can feed questions on each lesson learnt and the learners of the same can be spot tested through that. Even a learner can raise questions and give opinions individually through feedback provisions available in the computer system. It also helps the teacher to get a quick feedback of the taught lessons and modify the lessons as per the demands of the learners. Besides, using computer one can also self-assessment questionnaire so as to help learners have self-assessment and evaluation after every lesson.

5) Easy Documentation and Retrieval of Knowledge:

One of the general uses of ICT, which is also a boon in the field of education is its easy documentation and retrieval of knowledge. In teaching English, this helps easy storage lessons and easy retrieval of the same whenever-wherever required for repeated reference as well as for practice. Using ICT, any bulk of information can be organised systematically and stored easily in a computer system or over online over websites. It also makes the access to the stored information easy as a search can locate the required lesson within few seconds. This process indeed gives ample scope for English language teachers to create lessons. On other hand, provides variety of sources for the learners to learn a particular topic.

6) Provides Adequate Training in Non-verbal aspects of Communication:

The US journal, *The Journal of Consulting Psychology* published a study in 1967 conducted by two researchers name Albert Mehrabian and Susan R. Ferris, which made an attempt to understand the importance of nonverbal aspects communication. The research explored the relative importance of words, tone of voice and body language in understanding an underlying emotional message. It concluded that the interpretation of a message is 7 percent verbal, 38 percent vocal and 55 percent visual. The conclusion was that 93 percent of communication is "nonverbal" in nature.

The above research has an interesting implication for ELT as the learners in learning hardly get natural language environment, which is very important to hone skills related to non-verbal aspects. However, in an ICT enabled English teaching, non-verbal aspects of communications can be trained effectively using audio-visual aids of teaching and computer. This is very much helpful in English teaching as it provides the learners adequate exposure for para-language aspects, which include all those non-verbal cues of communication such as body language, gestures and postures, intonation, facial expression etc. Thus, using ICT in teaching English is a great palliative for the gap created out of cultural differences between us and the native speakers of English.

7) Creates a Portable Classroom and Help Consistency of Learning:

Using ICT facility in education can change the traditional classroom in to a portable one as it eases the shifting of teaching materials as well as learning situation. It is an added privilege in ELT as learners can attend class in any far-off center through video conferencing and such other online teaching facilities. It establishes a close teacher-pupil contact though there is a great gap of time and space. Besides, the online course materials, for example, may

be accessed at any place and help the learners to practice the language at their convenient time and assures consistent learning. Further, the ICT-based educational delivery of English (e.g., educational programming broadcast over radio or television) also provides learners a forum to learn English from experts.

8) Provides a Gateway to Learning Resources in English:

Teachers and learners no longer have to rely solely on printed books and other materials, which are available in limited quantities in libraries, for their educational needs. Today, as a result of the development in the field of the Internet and the World Wide Web, a wealth of teaching-learning materials on every subject including English easily accessible. This provides a very useful gate way to learning resources available across the globe. Using ICT in teaching-learning process also facilitates access to resource persons, mentors, experts, researchers, professionals, business leaders, and peers—all over the world. This is especially helpful to train and polish the accent of English learners.

9) Prepare the Learners for the workplace:

Using ICT in teaching-learning should be an integral part of today's education as the need of the hour is to prepare the current generation of students for a workplace where ICTs, particularly computers, the Internet and related technologies, are becoming more and more ubiquitous. In this scenario, using ICT in ELT would help the learners to improve their computer skills and soft skills along with contributing to further their communicative skills in English.

10) Miscellaneous Benefits:

Other than the above benefits, ICT usage in ELT also facilitates the teachers and students in teaching learning process in the following ways:

- As ICT facilitates sharing of resources, expertise and advice, the teaching learning process will be enriched and resourceful.
- The teaching-learning process becomes easy as there is greater flexibility in when and where tasks are carried out.
- Both teachers and learners gain in ICT literacy skills, confidence and enthusiasm.
- For a teacher, ICT enables easier planning and preparation of lessons and designing materials. Also, easy and better storage of the same for future use.
- Access to up-to-date pupil and school data, anytime and anywhere.
- Computer use during lessons motivates students to continue using learning outside school hours.
- Higher quality lessons through greater exposure to resources.
- More focused teaching, tailored to students' strengths and weaknesses, through better analysis of attainment data.
- Gains in understanding and analytical skills, including improvements in reading comprehension.
- Development of writing skills (including spelling, grammar, punctuation, editing and re-drafting), also fluency, originality and elaboration.
- Encouragement of independent and active learning, and self-responsibility for learning along with fostering creative thinking.
- Students who used ICT in school felt more successful in school, were more motivated to learn and have increased self-confidence and self-esteem.
- ICT can be a solution for the situation like natural calamities or a pandemic where a teacher has to keep track of a students' learning staying away from them.
- Accuracy, brevity, and clarity (ABC of teaching) in teaching can be ensured better in an ICT enabled classroom.

Thus, using ICT in teaching and learning of English language eases the process in plenty of ways. ICT can enhance the quality of education in several ways: by increasing learner motivation and engagement by facilitating the acquisition of basic skills, and by enhancing teacher training. Though there are conflicting opinions about the concept such as the fear of data loss, requirement of a heavy budget, necessity of good computer skills for teachers etc.., ICT can become a boon in English language learning because of its above-mentioned benefits. However, a wise use of the technology and exploiting it to constructive output rests on the users.

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